

SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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Outline Of Reference Paper On:

SOVIET YOUTH BREATHES FRESH LIFE INTO THE ARTS

Young Soviet poets, film makers, writers, artists, dramatists and musicians have lately been producing work the like of which has not been seen in the Soviet Union since the end of the 1920's.

In their quest for "universal truth" Soviet young people have treated subjects such as anti-Semitism, non-representational art, progressive jazz, "voluntary" social work, and the mechanization and dreariness of Soviet life. But even more striking than the unexpected subjects they are using is the viewpoint from which they treat these unusual subjects.

They do not approach their work from the standpoint of traditional Soviet morality, from the standpoint which places above all the interests of building Communism and the interests of the Soviet State which directs that work.

Instead, the "fourth generation" of Soviet youth, as they have been dubbed officially, views life and art from the standpoint of personal moral commitment and responsibility, from the standpoint that considers first personal, individual development and integrity.

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SOVIET YOUTH BREATHES FRESH LIFE INTO THE ARTS

Throughout the Soviet arts there are increasing indications that Soviet young people are chafing within the narrow limits of official right and wrong and are beginning to think for themselves and even to express their new thoughts. The trend toward free-thinking in all branches of Soviet art appears not only in literature--especially in the poetry of such idols as Yevgeny Yevtushenko--but in discussions and speeches on abstract art, in young people's private jazz and rock-'n-roll sessions, and in arguments about literature and art; it even appears on the walls of their rooms which are covered with reproductions of surrealist paintings clipped from foreign magazines (Yunost, Youth, Nov. 9, 1961).

In Soviet Music, for example, there has been a break with the officially cultivated popular taste. Izvestia on August 23, 1961 carried an article entitled, "When Jazz is Played," by Tsfasman, a Soviet composer of jazz and other light music. He called for the development of jazz on a par with other branches of Soviet music. The article declares, "In order to put an end to dilettantism, the time has come to start classes in music schools for jazz conductors, arrangers, instrumentalists, and vocalists." The author rebukes the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Soviet Composers because "they do not pay due attention to light music." Stating that jazz has long since "entered deeply into the life of Soviet youth," he makes fun of the hypocrisy of the Soviet press, theater, motion pictures, and art critics. Tsfasman writes:

You do not meet references to jazz in essays or stories devoted to our progressive youth.... When is jazz mentioned? Only when it is an accessory in a criminal offence and lands those who live the "fine life" in jail.... When a producer attempts to use music to reveal the inner life of a man, for the hero he employs a folk song, and for the villain, jazz.... I am not yet speaking of criticism. Where is it still possible to rage and fulminate against both program and performance irresponsibly and without evidence,

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without taking into consideration either the talent or the labor, except in a review of jazz?

The same kind of freedom of approach appears in the search for universal truth in the Soviet motion pictures. A case in point is the following statement by the eminent young Soviet motion picture producer, G. Chukhrai, known for his Ballad of a Soldier and Clear Sky:

I do not think that there are any prohibited subjects in art. One can portray the most vile and the most base from exalted and noble standpoints, and, on the contrary, one can bring the highest and most precious down to the ditch. Everything depends on the artist's standpoint. When I hear some of our motion picture people say that Fellini's films are bad because they depict the horrors and abominations of a disintegrating bourgeois society, I cannot agree. And not only because Fellini's La Dolce Vita is a work of manly, stern truth, but because in everything that is depicted in the film I see the artist's philosophy (Izvestia, July 9, 1961).

Chukhrai openly states that it is no sin to borrow the philosophical "essence" and hence the ideology from the motion pictures of eminent "bourgeois" producers and that such borrowing is perhaps even very useful for the Soviet producer. Also of interest in this connection is a Soviet motion picture entitled Mishka, Serezha, and I based on a story of the same name by the young writers N. Zeleransky and B. Larin which had been published in Nos. 7--8, 1959, of Yunost and denounced by the Party critics as a "seditious" work. The producer daringly followed in the steps of the authors of the story, using one scene after another to show the futility of Communist education in Soviet schools. The producer shows a senior class which he calls a "horde" because it is "indifferent, unorganized, scoffing, and vicious." The film ridicules "social" measures for collecting scrap metal and shows how the pupils, with Komsomol badges on their chests, steal the roofing iron intended for a local house in order to fulfill the norm for collecting scrap metal. An article in Pravda on October 9, 1961 called this picture a "distorting mirror" of Soviet life.

Commenting on the current state of Soviet theater, producer Ruben Simonov asserts that when Soviet theatrical producers stage plays sympathetic toward "contemporary life," they appear to "understand why contemporary life is worth discussing. They understand, but they do not feel it." Therefore, he charges, such plays are hollow and theatrical companies are "indifferent" to them. So too are the audiences, both while they are watching them and after they have gone home. (Ogonek, Flame, No. 40, 1961).

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In contemporary Soviet painting many young Soviet artists have gone over from "socialist realism" to impressionism and sometimes even to expressionism. This change is evident in most reproductions of paintings by contemporary Soviet artists published in Yunost, such as those by the young Y. Ikriklovensky in No. 6, 1960, paintings by A. Rybachuk and V. Melnichenko in No. 8, 1960, drawings by L. Soifertis in No. 9, 1960, paintings by M. Feichik in No. 11, 1959, and landscapes by T. Nissky in No. 5, 1960. Nissky openly teaches his theory on art, asserting that it is his aim to see "life today according to today's standards. To seek in it my own feelings and those of others and to interpret them concisely (Yunost, No. 5, 1960, p. 99) and "to create and present new forms to people (Kommunist, No. 6, 1961, p.57).

But along with this ferment in other branches of Soviet art, the center of agitation is to be found in Soviet literature produced by young authors. The "fourth generation" of Soviet writers, as it is officially called by Soviet critics, aspires to universal truth, and defends objectivity against Party-imposed stereotypes.

On September 19, 1961, Literaturnaya Gazeta (Literary Gazette) the organ of the Soviet Union of Writers, published a poem by the young but well-known Soviet poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, entitled "Babi Yar," dealing with a subject strange to Soviet literature, anti-Semitism. The young poet has for years been under sharp fire from Soviet critics for his "subjective" and "lyrical" campaign against Communist stereotypes prevailing in Soviet Literature. In this poem he has taken up the cause of the Jewish people who have been suffering considerable discrimination in the Soviet Union. Basing his poem on the Nazi massacre of a great number of Jews in Babi Yar near Kiev during World War II, Yevtushenko, on behalf of the entire Russian people, disassociates himself from anti-Semitism. He uses his denunciation of anti-Semitism as an occasion to present one of his favorite subjects--the psychological and philosophical concept of "Russianism." In "Babi Yar" he goes much further than in any of his previous writings. He seeks to transcend mere speculation so as to become the "prophet and conscience" of his generation.

Because of this poem, Yevtushenko was attacked afresh by Party critics. In an article entitled, "About a Poem," published in the issue of Literatura i Zhizn (Literature and Life), on September 27, 1961, D. Stari-kov brands Yevtushenko's "Babi Yar" an obvious deviation from Communist doctrine, ideologically based on bourgeois doctrine. Indignant that Yevtushenko refers only to Jews who died, the critic declares that in so restricting himself "he has insulted the memory of the Soviet people who were killed." While analyzing and violently criticizing Yevtushenko's concept of "Russianism," he recalls the author's previous poems about

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Russia which, to his disgust, have for some reason failed to draw Soviet public and critical indignation against them. The critic asks why Yevtushenko is allowed to do as he likes. Indeed it is true that Yevtushenko has been allowed to do a great deal. During recent years he has traveled abroad in both Europe and America, has been the spokesman for contemporary Soviet youth, and, despite fierce Communist criticism, has raised many thorny questions. Today Yevtushenko is unquestionably the most popular poet among Soviet young people. They read him avidly and recite his poems and their own imitations, and not only in dormitory rooms, but even publicly on the streets, despite the opposition of local Komsomol leaders.

Of the Soviet poets who represent this trend, in addition to Yevtushenko mention should be made of A. Voznesensky, B. Akhmadulina, S. Polikarpov, N. Matveyeva, Yu. Pankratov, E. Kuchinsky, I. Kharabarov, A. Koreyev, and Yu. Druzhina. In recent years, despite attacks by Party critics, they have insisted on dealing with many thorny problems. In lyrical form, Matveyev has protested against what he calls the harm of the Soviet stereotype, declaring that Sa Di, the well-known twelfth century Persian poet, would have withered away "under the noise of a punching machine. Fear not the bullets, fear the set pattern: it is stupid, it is ridiculous, and in it is the end of the world." (Komsomolskaya Pravda, October 8, 1961)

Among writings by Soviet prosewriters of the "fourth generation" dealing with problems which pain the Communist critics, the following merit attention: "A, B, C, D, E" by V. Rozov, "The Starry Ticket" and "Colleagues" by V. Aksenov, "Girls" and "The Continuation of a Legend" by A. Kuznetsov, "Everything is Just Beginning" by E. Stavsky, "Smoke in the Eyes," by A. Gladilin, "The Empty Race" by S. Antonov, "Public Favorite" by E. Cherepakhova, and "The Melting Earth" by V. Nikitin. Most of these stories are very subjective. They are either written in the first person or deal with events in which the author participates. The heroes are young and most of them are travelers and seekers who aim to dispel their doubts and disappointments engendered by Soviet stereotypes. In them, for example, in V. Rozov's "A, B, C, D, E" (Yunost, No. 9, September, 1961), there are often original ideas regarding a view of life strange to Marxism-Leninism. In an article on "the fourth generation" published in Literaturnaya Gazeta on July 27, 1961, Soviet critics reproach young writers for lack of what they call "a mature civic consciousness," which they interpret as a failure to reflect the political interests of the people, and preoccupation with subjective "confessions." These critics insist that young writers drop breast-beating to preach the virtues of the present-day "positive hero" and his "Communist morality."

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A recent story by V. Tendryakov, "The Trial," published in Novy Mir, 1New World, No. 3, 1961 aroused another similar discussion among Soviet critics. The story examines the moral conflict between the "official" class of the Soviet people represented by an amoral inspector, Dityachev, and a hunter from a distant part of Siberia, Teterin, who has remained untouched by Soviet "civilization." The story constitutes a political "trial" of Soviet life as a whole. As in the other writings of the "fourth generation," the conflict is between the psychology and morality of the "natural man," the son of nature, who "carries away everything that is best in its primal form from the dark bear kingdom..." on the one hand, and the psychology, morality, and behavior of the "official" people, even those of great natural ability, who are spoiled by Soviet "civilization" (Izvestia, May 12, 1961). The critics reproached Tendryakov on the ground that "he set off nature against society, the biological principle against the social, and what is worse, the socialist principle" (Literatura I Zhizn, May 19, 1961). "The jungle of instincts and alchemical experiments with the universal principle in its pure form draw the writer even farther away and prevent him even more from understanding his own time," says Literatura I Zhizn on May 7, 1961.

In recent months it has been possible to find in the pages of the Soviet press many articles by Party critics showering verbal darts on the editors of Soviet publications which have carried the work of young poets and writers fighting for intellectual emancipation. For example, on September 15, 1961, Komsomolskaya Pravda criticizes the editors of Yunost as follows:

... A journal intended for the young reader.... On the pages of Yunost there is no expression of pure and clear ideals, but a vague, vacillating, sometimes false and even alien world outlook or approach to life. One cannot but speak frankly and impartially about this.

On September 27, 1961, Literatura I Zhizn writes as follows about the editors of Literaturnaya Gazeta for their toleration of Yevtushenko:

Why is the editorial board of the all-union writers newspaper now allowing Yevtushenko to cast abuse on the triumph of Lenin's nationality policy with such comparisons and "reminders" which one can only regard as provocation?

However, despite such criticism, these publications have been carrying even more radical stories and essays. On October 1, 1961, Komsomolskaya Pravda admitted that the young people fighting against stagnation and routine in the work of the Komsomol are turning over the pages of Yunost in their search for answers to the various problems with which youth is concerned.

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Neither the criticism aimed at the young free-thinking Soviet writers and artists nor official instructions are being accepted. Apparently among Soviet leaders there are some who understand the need for allowing the younger generation some creative "freedom of thought." Study of the Soviet press indicates that leading creative people of the older Soviet generation include some who support these new developments in the arts. These older men of the arts rely on the strivings and hopes of the younger Soviet generation and reflect them; on occasion they even go further and in turn stimulate the processes of free thinking.

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